

BEWARE OF CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC'S ECUMENICAL PHILOSOPHY

January 14, 2001 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, wayoflife.org, fbns@wayoflife.org) - Contemporary Christian Music is one of the glues holding together the end-times ecumenical movement, and it represents a great danger to Bible-believing churches. In a recent interview with Christianity Today, Don Moen of Integrity Music said: "I've discovered that worship [music] is transdenominational, transcultural. It bridges any denomination. Twenty years ago there were many huge divisions between denominations. Today I think the walls are coming down. In any concert that I do, I will have 30-50 different churches represented."

Ecumenical terms which permeate the CCM scene include "anointed," "the body," "united," "John 17," "tolerance," "non-critical love," "judge not," "no finger pointing," etc. These are terms that identify the philosophy of the end-times ecumenical movement described in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 and other passages. The end-times apostasy is characterized by a rejection of strong biblical absolutes and reproof and doctrine and by teachers who pamper instead of preach, who generalize instead of being specific, who are positive rather than "negative," who build self esteem rather than call for repentance.

Contemporary Christian Music is at home in the most ecumenical of contexts. The same music will be perfectly at home in a Roman Catholic retreat or a World Council of Churches conference or a charismatic Laughing Revival.

CCM is the music of ecumenical evangelism, as epitomized by Billy Graham and Luis Palau crusades. The following is a description of Billy Graham's 1997 crusade in San Antonio, Texas.

"More than 700 San Antonio churches representing over 50 denominations have joined together for the Graham crusade, which hopes to attract South Texas youth with big-name Christian rock acts [Amy Grant, dc Talk, Charlie Daniels Band, Michael W. Smith, Steve Green, and Jaci Velasquez] and a Saturday service just for kids" (*Houston Chronicle*, April 2, 1997).

CCM was the music of the massive "Key '73" evangelistic program which was promoted by Billy Graham and many other key Christian leaders. The program brought together Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Roman Catholics. To create such a broad ecumenical unity requires that doctrinal issues be ignored. The message must be limited when the fellowship is enlarged. This ecumenical philosophy controlled the type of music which was used:

"An extensive invitation was sent out for new music to be written that promoted the message of 'Key '73' with several stipulations: the words *righteousness*, *judgment*,

holiness, repentance, and several other biblical terms were not allowed to be used, and THE LYRICS WERE TO BE OF A POSITIVE NATURE. There was an intentional effort made to write NON-OFFENSIVE songs” (H.T. Spence, *Confronting Contemporary Christian Music*, p. 142).

Contemporary Christian Music was also the music of the largest ecumenical charismatic conference of the 1980s. This was New Orleans ‘87, held in July 1987. I attended this with press credentials. After four days of “renewal” choruses and Christian rock, it was obvious to me that CCM was the preferred music of the roughly 40,000 ecumenical-charismatics in attendance. Approximately 40 different denominations and groups came together under one roof, including Episcopalian, Church of Christ, United Methodist, American Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church USA, and dozens of others. Fifty percent of those in attendance were Roman Catholics. Roman Catholic priest Tom Forrest delivered the closing message and brought the mixed multitude to their feet when he called for unity. “We must reach the world,” he cried, “and we must reach it the only way we can reach it; we must reach it TOGETHER!” At those words the crowd became ecstatic, leaping to their feet, shouting, stomping, speaking in tongues, dancing. This same priest, speaking at a conference I attended in Indianapolis in 1990, said he is thankful for purgatory because he knows that he will not go to Heaven except through that means. Obviously he does not believe in the once-for-all sufficiency of Christ’s atonement. At the book sales area in New Orleans one could purchase Rosary beads and Madonna’s to assist in one’s prayers to Mary. A Catholic mass was held every morning during the conference. The music that held all of this confusion together was CCM. Youth Explosion ‘87 was held at the same time, and 5,000 young people were bombarded with a steady diet of unscriptural teaching, ecumenism, testimonies by sports stars and entertainment figures, and ROCK music.

CCM is perfectly at home in the midst of such apostate ecumenical confusion.

The intimate charismatic connection within Contemporary Christian Music guarantees that it will be ecumenical. For example the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International, in its earlier days, popularized a song which proclaimed, “I don’t care what church you belong to.” That was dropped and replaced with a Catholic song, “We Are One in the Spirit,” which proclaims, “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord and we pray that all unity may one day be restored...” (Michael Harper, *Three Sisters: A Provocative Look at Evangelicals, Charismatics, & Catholic Charismatics and Their Relationship to One Another*, pp. 28,29). When the Roman Catholic Church sings about Christian unity, of course, it is singing about non-Catholics being united with Rome!

The 1996 CCM hit “Gather at the River” promotes the ecumenical theme:

"Sometimes we don't see eye to eye/ WE DON'T AGREE; WE DON'T KNOW WHY/ BUT JESUS PRAYED THAT WE'D BE ONE/ For the sake of God's own Son/ CAN WE PUT AWAY OUR DIFFERENCES/ LAY DOWN OUR PRIDE/ It's time we start turning the tide" (Joel Lindsey and Regie Hamm, "Gather at the River," *20 Contemporary Christian Hits*, Vol. 2, Benson Music Group, 1996).

This song is built upon the false ecumenical interpretation of John 17:21, which claims that the unity for which Christ prayed is an ecumenical unity of professing Christians which disregards biblical doctrine. The context of John 17 destroys this myth. In John 17 the Lord plainly emphasizes that the unity He desires is one based on salvation and Truth. It is not a unity of true Christians with false. It is not a unity that ignores doctrinal differences for the sake of an enlarged fellowship. (1) The unity of John 17 is a God-created unity (John 17:11). There is nothing in Christ's prayer to indicate that men are to do something to create the unity for which He prayed. John 17 is a prayer addressed to God the Father, not to men. It is not something man needs to do; it is something God has already done. The prayer was answered almost 2,000 years ago. It is a spiritual reality which was created by God among genuine believers who are committed to the Scriptures, not a possibility which must be organized by man. (2) The unity of John 17 is a unity in truth (vv. 17,19,6,8,14). Christ emphasized that He was praying for those who love and obey the Word of God. This is certainly not a prayer which envisions the modern ecumenical crowd which downplays and ignores the Word of God for the sake of a broad, lowest-common-denominator unity.

Note, too, that this ecumenical CCM song pretends that the doctrinal divisions between Christians are the result of pride ("lay down our pride") and ignorance ("we don't agree; we don't know why"). This conveniently overlooks the Bible's commands about defending the faith and separating from error. Christians who take these commands seriously refuse to be ecumenical, not because they are proud or ignorant, but because they desire to please the Lord. This ecumenical song slanders Bible-believing Christians who practice biblical separation.

CCM's influence toward ecumenism is well stated by a man who at one time preached against it--BOB LARSON.

"Have you ever seen a bunch of young people (be they Lutheran, Presbyterian, or Baptist, charismatic or evangelical) setting aside their religious idiosyncrasies to jump and shout when Petra walks on stage?... The shared experience will send them back to their own churches less theologically exclusive. From that moment on, they are 'not of this world' with all of its petty ecclesiastical divisions." (Bob Larson, *Contemporary Christian Music Magazine*, December 1985).

This statement by Larson is extremely sad. There was a time when he preached against Christian rock, yet he refused to separate from charismatics and others who were walking a path of disobedience and error. He held meetings under

charismatic and ecumenical sponsorship, as well as the sponsorship of other groups and churches which were not scriptural. Now we see the fruit of this disobedience and reckless disregard for biblical separation. Has God not warned that evil communications corrupt good manners?

Again, God is proven true. Men set aside God's commands for separation to their own spiritual detriment. Once Larson preached against Christian rock; now he is ensnared by it and promotes the Devil's grand worldwide ecumenical schemes. (Not only has Larson abandoned his former position on music, but he divorced the wife of his youth and married another woman.)

THE GAITHERS are very ecumenical and have a close, non-critical relationship with the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. They provided the music one evening at Indianapolis '90, another large ecumenical charismatic gathering I attended with press credentials. One-half of the 25,000 participants were Roman Catholics and the other half represented roughly 40 different denominations. A Catholic mass was held each morning during this conference, and a Catholic priest brought the closing message. The Gaithers were at home in this unscriptural gathering and entertained the mixed multitude with their jazzy music.

The Gaithers frequently perform and record songs which present an ecumenical philosophy. "Songs that Answer Questions" from their Back Home in Indiana album has the following lyrics:

"Don't want to spend my life a preachin' sermons/ that give answers to the questions no one's asking anywhere/ When there's so much pain and hurting/ there's no time to be searching/ for the needles in the haystacks that aren't there/ I wanna spend my time a wearin' myself out for Jesus/ with the news a cure's been found to heal our land/ Stead of making lists, inventing creeds/ that aren't concerned with people's needs/ I'll show 'em how to touch the nail scarred hand/ Don't wanna spend my time prayin' prayers/ Bombarding heaven with requests to rain down fire on saints who care [unclear]/ In our methods we may differ, but if Christ the Lord we live for/ May we not forget the enemy is OUT THERE."

This song contains half-truths and subtle errors, which are more dangerous than plain and obvious errors. While it is true that God's people are to be concerned about suffering and are to be showing people how to "touch the nail scarred hand," it is not true that preaching is to be limited merely to answering questions people have. The preacher is instructed to preach the whole counsel of God and the whole Word of God (Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 4:1-2). The Bible warns that it is apostate people who will desire teachers who teach merely what they want to hear, what they feel a need for (2 Timothy 4:3-4). This sounds very much like what the Gaithers are singing about.

It is also not true that "a cure's been found to heal our land." The cure provided by the Gospel is the cure for personal salvation, not national salvation. The

Apostles did not try to “heal the land,” they preached the Gospel and disciplined believers. It is also not true that it is wrong to “make lists” or “invent creeds” that aren’t concerned with people’s needs. The lists and creeds mentioned in this song refer to doctrinal studies and statements of faith. Doctrinal studies must, first of all, faithfully represent Bible truth, regardless of whether or not it meets “people’s needs.” Sound Bible doctrine does meet man’s deepest needs, of course, but that does not mean that Bible doctrine meets the felt needs of unsaved or carnal people. The unsaved or carnal man does not feel he has a need to be told he is a sinner or that he has no righteousness before God or that he is to repent or that he is to die to self or that he is to separate from the world or that there is an eternal hell, etc., but sound Bible doctrine tells him all of these things. The unsaved crowd does not believe it needs any of the Bible, really! This song encourages the hearers to despise doctrinal studies and research and teaching and statements of faith, which is the attitude typically found in the ecumenical movement.

It is also not true that the divisions among Christians are merely about differing methods or that differing methods are not important. Take baptism, for example. Some denominations “baptize” infants. That is their “method.” Some baptize only those who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior. Some sprinkle; others immerse. These are differing methods, but they are not insignificant and cannot be ignored. It is also not true that the “enemy” is limited to things outside of the churches. The Bible warns of false teachers, false christs, false spirits, false gospels, deluding spirits, doctrines of devils--all of which will be found within churches and among professing Christians.

It is also not true that fundamentalists are praying for fire to fall on those with whom they disagree doctrinally. That is a nonsensical--in fact, a vicious--slander.

The unscriptural and very dangerous message of this song is put across by the effective means of pleasant country-rock music and by the use of repetition.

Another ecumenical Gaither song is “Jesus Built This Church on Love” from their Back Home in Indiana album. The lead on the song is performed by Candy “Hemphill” Christmas, who travels with the Gaithers. The song is sung at many of the Gaither concerts. It is done in the style of a mid-tempo, jazzy black spiritual with heavy drums and bass guitar.

“Do you ever just get to wonderin’/ ‘bout the way things are today?/ So many on board this gospel ship/ Trying to row in a different way/ If we’d all pull together/ Like a family me and you/ We’d come a lot closer to doin’/ what the Lord called us to do.

Chorus: “Jesus built this church on love/ and that’s what it’s all about/ Trying to get everybody saved/ not to keep anybody out...”

This song implies that the divisions within Christianity are largely if not entirely man-made and unnecessary, that if professing Christians would merely “pull together” and exercise love the divisions would be healed. It is a feel-good sentiment, a nice fairy tale which has wide appeal, but it is unreasonable and unscriptural. The Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles warned repeatedly that false teachers would lead many astray, that there would be false christs, false spirits, false gospels, false churches, doctrines of devils (Matt. 7:15-23; 24:3-5,11,24; Acts 20:28-30; 2 Cor. 1:1-4; Galatians 1; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:13; 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 2; 1 John 4:1; Jude; etc.). The book of Revelation predicts a one-world end-time harlot Christian religion (Rev. 17). Those who preach an ecumenical unity rarely even mention these Bible warnings and never focus on them. They do not tell us where these false christs, false gospels, false spirits, false teachers, and false churches are in Christianity today. They imply, rather, that the denominational divisions are largely unnecessary and petty which could be overcome by a little ecumenical love. There are many problems among Christians which can be healed through love, but it simply is not true that love will heal the major divisions within Christianity. The differences between denominations involve serious doctrinal issues which cannot be ignored and cannot be solved through sentimental songs. This Gaither song also says the churches are “not to keep anybody out.” That is openly contrary to the Bible’s command to separate from error and to exercise church discipline (Rom. 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:16-21; 3:5; 2 John 8-11; Rev. 18:4).

Another ecumenical Gaither song is “Loving God, Living Each Other” from the album by that name.

“They pushed back from the table/ To listen to his words/ His secret plan before he had to go/ It’s not complicated/ Don’t need a lot of rules/ This is all you need to know/ We tend to make it harder/ Build steeples out of stone/ Fill books with explanations of the way/ But if we’d stop and listen/ And break a little bread/ We would hear the Master say/ It’s Loving God, loving each other/ Making music with my friends/ Loving God, loving each other/ And the story never ends.”

The song contains more half truths and subtle errors. Love is a very important part of the Christian life, but true Christian love is obeying God’s Word (John 14:23; 1 John 5:3). To say that we “don’t need a lot of rules” ignores the fact that the New Testament is literally filled with commandments! To say that we don’t need to “fill books with explanations of the way” ignores the fact that the Bible instructs us to “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). It ignores the fact that the Bible is given for “doctrine” (teaching) (2 Tim. 3:16) and that preachers are instructed to teach other men (2 Tim. 2:2), that older women are instructed to teach younger women (Titus 2:3-5), etc. Bible teaching certainly

involves “filling books with explanations of the way.” That is precisely what the Apostles did in the Epistles. The Bible itself contains 66 books with explanations of the way!

This Gaither song presents a sentimental, ecumenical approach to the Christian life and ministry which is simplistic and appealing to a modern crowd but which is patently contrary to the Scriptures.

Beware of Contemporary Christian Music. Not only is it worldly; it promotes false doctrine.